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**CITY OF GLOUCESTER
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**

March 31, 2022

Secretary Michael Kennealy
Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
1 Ashburton Place, Room 2101
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Secretary Kennealy,

I am writing to share my comments on the draft MBTA Guidelines (draft guidelines) for the new Section 3A of M.G.L. Chapter 40A as amended by Section 18 of Chapter 358 of the Acts of 2020 (legislation). I appreciate the work of the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and agencies of the Executive Offices, in taking bold steps to address the housing needs of the Commonwealth. As you know, there is much work to be done to address our housing needs and I agree that municipalities need to take an active role. I cannot, however, support the current framework presented in the draft guidelines, therefore I offer the following comments.

I agree with the broad principles of the legislation and the draft guidelines highlighted in Section 3(b). In particular, and I think most importantly, the principles propose that multi-family districts are "of a scale, density and character that are consistent with a community's long-term planning goals" and that "differences in community characteristics must be considered in determining what is "reasonable" for each community." Unfortunately, I do not believe the draft guidelines provide the proper tools for communities to do so.

Communities with robust public transit certainly view this as an asset, but it must also be recognized that for the very same reason, communities like Gloucester have long been centers of commerce and housing development. With strong local control many MBTA Communities continue to be producers of housing, which should be recognized and respected. Unfortunately, this existing, valued dense housing stock has been made the basis of future capacity in the draft guidelines.

While it is understood there is some flexibility and choice regarding how a community may comply with the draft guidelines, the capacity calculation has made it difficult to initiate meaningful community discussions. Given that our development pattern has been reinforced over centuries, there is no way of accounting for the existing density on

undersized lots and in non-conforming structures. This in aggregate already greatly surpasses the 15 units per acre gross density target of the draft guidelines. The use of gross density in the draft guidelines (Section 6 Minimum Gross Density) penalizes communities with more road right-of-ways, or broader right-of-ways. In Gloucester, this would ultimately require zoned districts with densities higher than 15 units per acre in order to comply. This requirement in the draft guidelines will only further confuse the difference between production (which is not required), zoned capacity, and minimum compliant gross density.

It is also important that I highlight the largest concern that I have heard from my constituents - there are no affordability goals or requirements included in the draft guidelines. Beyond supply alone, the greatest need in the region is affordable housing. Gloucester has been moving initiatives forward to implement our Housing Production Plan since its approval in 2017. In the last two years alone Gloucester has revised our inclusionary housing requirements, adopted a by right Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance, and partnered in the development of more than 100 units of deed restricted affordable housing. I suggest the metrics used in these guidelines also include affordability goals and recognize local efforts to increase multi-family housing options.

The Commonwealth's continued investment in MBTA communities is imperative for the successful creation of housing. A commitment to the long-term maintenance and enhancement of MBTA commuter rail service to Gloucester is going to become particularly important with the expected increased ridership suggested in this approach to zoning. It is also important to acknowledge that the very grant programs that are being held over communities that do not comply with the final guidelines, have previously been instrumental in the creation of multi-family housing and local economic development.

In summary, if the intent of the Governor and the Legislature is for widespread compliance and ultimately progress in addressing our housing needs, the guidelines must be substantially re-thought. It is also critical that more time must be provided for review, comment, action plan development, zoning development and passage at the local level.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Greg Verga
Mayor